ABSTRACT: This report updates Members on proposals for improvements to the current Angus Council Mutual Exchange Scheme.
Given these issues, consideration has now been given to how the Council’s existing mutual exchange scheme can be modernised and enhanced.

3. **PROPOSALS**

3.1 A number of options for the modernisation of the current mutual exchange system have now been identified, with the option to seek the involvement of some or all of the Council’s RSL partners in the majority of instances. Aside from in-house options, a number of external web-based mutual exchange systems have been considered to identify the best value option for Angus Council. Of these, the House Exchange and HomeSwapper systems have been selected for more in-depth consideration. Some initial discussions have also been held with the Council’s RSL partners. A short-list of options for modernisation of the current mutual exchange system is set-out below, setting-out the potential advantages and disadvantages of each for both tenants and the Council (Appendix 1 provides additional information).

**Option A**
Angus Council signs-up to the House Exchange website, along with some/all RSLs operating in Angus (Recommended).

**Option B**
Angus Council signs-up to the House Exchange website without RSL partners.

**Option C**
Angus Council signs-up to the HomeSwappers website, along with some/all RSL partners.

**Option D**
Angus Council signs-up to the HomeSwappers website without RSL partners.

**Option E**
Internal modernisation of the Angus Council mutual exchange system, with lists available in hard copy in ACCESS Offices and libraries and online on the Angus Council website.

3.2 All five options would improve our service for our tenants who are, or may be, interested in a mutual exchange. Angus Council currently has around 500 tenants who are overcrowded or under-occupy their current home, and who may consequently be interested in the mutual exchange.

3.3 Option A offers the greatest potential benefit in terms of numbers of potential swaps for Council tenants, both in Angus and in neighbouring Council areas. There will be an initial set up cost of around £750 and thereafter an annual fee of £1,800 for access to a bespoke version of the House Exchange website. There may also be opportunities to spread the costs and develop enhanced joint working with our RSL partners. However, agreement will be required from interested RSL partners, both in terms of signing-up to House Exchange and contributing towards costs. Action will need to be taken to ensure that vulnerable groups are not excluded from using the system.

3.4 Option B would still represent an improvement in service for our tenants, but with fewer potential swaps likely to be identified, and all costs to be met by the Council. Again, actions will need to be taken to ensure that vulnerable groups are not excluded from using the system.

3.5 Options C and D offer some similar benefits to options A and B. However, while HomeSwappers is one of the largest on-line mutual exchange systems for Council and RSLs tenants, fewer of our neighbouring Councils are partners with HomeSwappers and only a few social landlords operating in Angus are partners with HomeSwappers. Annual costs for the system are also higher at £2,800 per annum (55% more than House Exchange).
3.6 Option E would again represent an improvement in service for our tenants, but with fewer potential swaps likely to be identified. Development of an in-house on-line system which is as user-friendly as the House Exchange or HomeSwappers systems is also likely to prove relatively costly and time-consuming.

3.7 Members will wish to note that for all of the above options “informed consent” will be required from Angus Council and RSLs tenants to share their details with potential swappers. Pro forma consent arrangements already form part of the House Exchange model (options A and B), and regarding option E, appropriate arrangements would be put in place to obtain “informed consent” from Council tenants.

3.8 Taking into account all of the above factors, Members are asked to approve the modernisation of Angus Council’s mutual exchange scheme via sign-up to the House Exchange website (Option A), in conjunction with some or all of the Council’s RSL partners.

4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There will be an annual fee of £1,800 for access to a bespoke version of the House Exchange website, with an additional set-up cost of circa £750, which also includes training and preparation of promotional materials. It is proposed to treat the first year of operation of the House Exchange system as a “pilot” and not seek contributions towards costs from the Council’s RSL partners. The initial costs for operating the pilot will, therefore, be met from the HRA revenue budget for 2011/12. If successful, contributions to the ongoing annual cost will be sought from participating partners.

4.2 There will also be some additional requirements on Common Housing Register, Community Housing Team and ACCESS staff time in terms of dealing with initial enquiries, checking application details and approving exchanges. However, there should also be some savings in staff time in terms of fewer enquiries/contacts from households whose housing needs or aspirations are met via a mutual exchange, rather than remaining on waiting lists. Mutual exchange will also be another possible option which can be offered to existing tenants seeking re-housing. No additional staff will, however, be required and, therefore, any staff time cost will be contained within the HRA revenue budget for 2011/12.

5. **HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

6. **EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The issues dealt with in this report have been the subject of consideration from an equalities perspective. An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken.

7. **SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT**

7.1 This report contributes to the following Local Outcomes contained within the Single Outcome Agreement for Angus:-

- Good quality housing is available to all in communities throughout Angus;
- Resources are used effectively.

8. **CONSULTATION**

8.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Corporate Services, Head of Finance and Head of Law and Administration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.
9. CONCLUSION

9.1 In conclusion, a modernised Mutual Exchange Scheme will encourage tenants to consider exchanging with another tenant when looking to move. This is a more customer-focused approach and will also facilitate better use of the Council’s housing stock.

9.2 With Members’ agreement, the modernised mutual exchange scheme utilising the House Exchange system, will be made available and actively promoted to the Angus tenants during 2011/12, as a 12-month pilot.

RON ASHTON
DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

NOTE: The background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) which were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report are:

- Report 13/11 “Angus Local Housing Strategy: Housing Need and Demand Assessment”;
- Report 143/11 “Downsizing Incentive Scheme”.

Hsg/NS/AMcK/LR/KS